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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BRASILIA 000369

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

CA/OCS/ACS, WHA/BSC

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC PGOV PREL BR TIP

SUBJECT: Murder of AmCit Dorothy Mae Stang

REF: Henshaw/OP Center Telcons, 12 Feb.

¶1. (U) This cable is Sensitive But Unclassified.

¶2. (U) Summary. US citizen and Catholic nun Dorothy Mae Stang was murdered in the northern Brazilian state of Para February 12. She was an advocate for the landless and had been involved in land disputes with powerful landlords. Brazilian state and federal government reactions have been forceful; three suspects have been named. The Embassy has spoken with next-of-kin. End Summary.

¶3. (U) US citizen Dorothy Mae Stang was shot to death in the interior of the Brazilian state of Para at 7:30 a.m. (GMT -3) on Saturday, February 12. Para, at the mouth of the Amazon, has a history of land disputes and lawlessness. The murder took place outside the town of Anapu, in the rural center of the state. She was killed by six shots (three to the head) by two gunmen on a rural roadside while waiting to meet with local farmers.

¶4. (U) Stang, a 74-year old Catholic nun, had lived in Brazil for thirty years and was well known as an activist for agrarian reform. She was a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame. Stang had received a number of death threats in recent years; earlier in the week of her death, she had met with federal human rights authorities to complain of recent threats. The death threats reportedly came from large landowners involved in the cattle and timber industries. Stang worked with landless peasants seeking land; the large landowners that opposed her efforts for the most part do not/not own their land legally, rather they maintain control by force. Stang supported efforts of the federal governments National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform, which seeks to place the landless on unused and underutilized land.

¶5. (U) Sister Dorothy, as she was known in Para, became a Brazilian citizen in 2003 and was named an honorary citizen of Para state in December 2004 by the states assembly, in recognition of her efforts to create sustainable development projects in the Amazon region. She had repeatedly stated that she believed her status as a nun would protect her against attacks.

¶6. (U) Brazils environment minister, Marina Silva (herself a follower of slain environmentalist Chico Mendes), who was in Para at the time, immediately visited the site and strongly condemned the murder. President Lula ordered the justice minister to deploy the federal police to work along side Para state police during the investigation. Lula also sent Nilmaro Miranda, his human rights Secretary, to Para to follow events. Various Para state officials, including the governor, also condemned the crime.

¶7. (U) Police are searching for three suspects; they have not released their names. Two are the gunmen, who were identified by witnesses of the murder. A third is a rancher suspected of organizing the killing. Later on February 12, Adalberto Xavier Leal, a ranch hand, was shot to death in Anapu. Leal worked for landowner Dinair Feijo Cunha; the Catholic Churchs Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) had accused Leal and Cunha of being behind Dorothy Stangs murder. (Note: We do not know if either Leal or Cunha were the same individuals being sought by the police.)

¶8. (U) Dorothy Stangs body was taken to Belem, the capital of Para, for an autopsy on February 13. Following a mass in her honor, Stangs body was flown back to Anapu on February 14 for burial.

¶9. (U) Both the Ambassador and Consul General spoke with Stangs brother, David Stang (719-487-1295) to offer our condolences. CG also spoke with Stangs sister, Barbara Richardson (937-275-6649). David Stang confirmed the familys support of the orders decision to bury his sister in Anapu, adding that it was his sisters wish to be buried there. Our consular agent in Belem attended

the autopsy and accompanied the body back to Anapu.

¶10. (SBU) LEGATT has offered its assistance to federal officials at the working level, but believes that they have the case well in hand, at least at this stage. LEGATT expertise may be needed as the case progresses, e.g., with ballistics.

¶11. (U) The Ambassador released the following statement February 14:

Begin Text:

I would like to express publicly what I have conveyed privately to Sister Dorothy Stang's family in the United States. I am saddened and appalled [and saddened] by this brutal and senseless killing. Sister Stang was a courageous individual who loved the people of Brazil and and who dedicated her life to serving [others] those less fortunate. I share the outrage over her tragic loss with her family, her order, and her friends and colleagues in Brazil who have worked with her over many years.

Sister Stang was well known to many at the Embassy. She had received U.S. government support through USAID for her work on women's issues and in defense of traditional populations in the Amazon.

The United States Embassy is following the investigation closely, and is encouraged by the swift reaction of both the Brazilian government and the Federal Police. We are confident that there will be a full and thorough investigation into this murder, and that those responsible will be brought to justice.

End Text.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: We are encouraged by the initial reaction of state and federal officials and believe it likely that arrests will be made. However, the courts are the weak link in the Brazilian criminal; once there it will take a good deal of pressure to keep the case moving. We plan to follow it closely.

Danilovich